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Government
Publication

FORT

BATTLEFORD

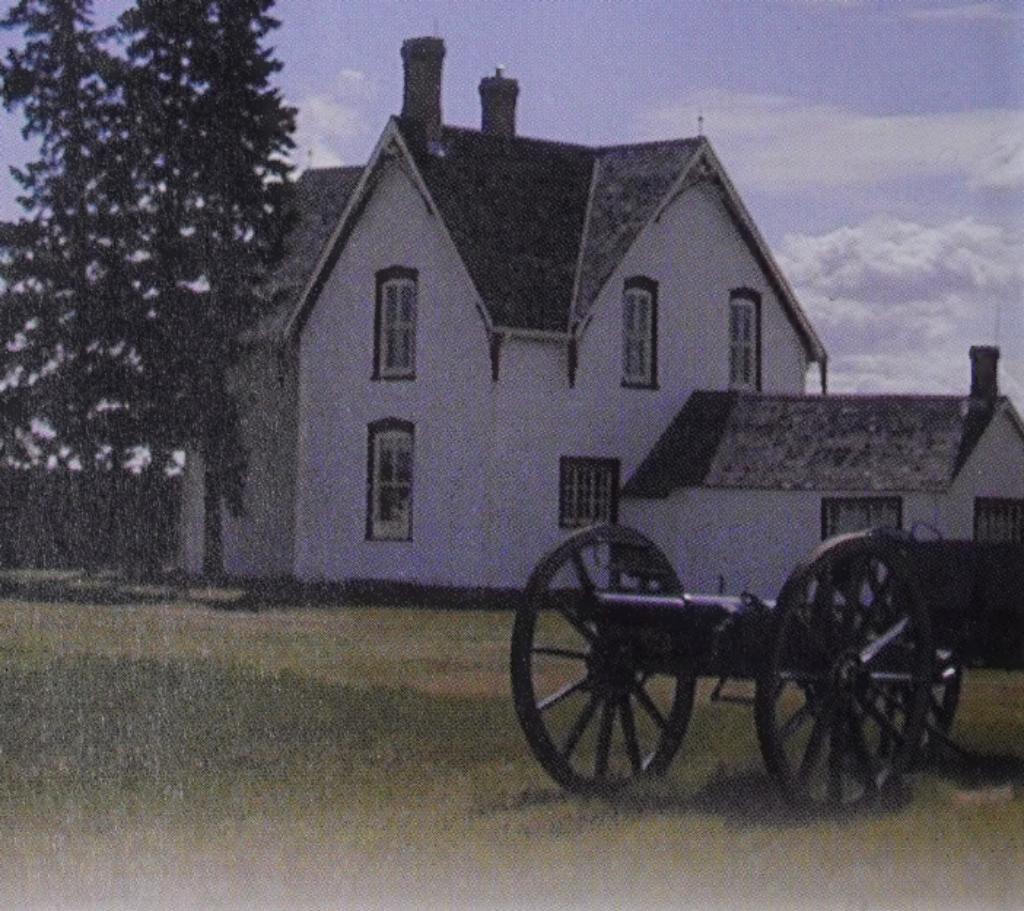
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA



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Commemorated in 1923, Fort Battleford is one of Canada's oldest national historic sites. The twenty-two hectare mounted police post includes five historic buildings, numerous archaeological resources, and historic trails which help tell the story of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) and their role in the development of the west. The NWMP was active in establishing and enforcing Canadian law, creating a Canadian government presence in the west and implementing Canada's Indian Policy during and after the treaty process. During the armed conflict of 1885, Fort Battleford was the base for military operations in the area. It was also here that Pitikwahanapiyiin (Poundmaker) came to negotiate terms of surrender before he was arrested and charged with treason. After the conflict, the fort remained the focal point of police activities in the area and was closed in 1924.

Learn about life in the NWMP and discover government objectives and First Nations peoples grievances during the armed conflict of 1885. The events leading up to and resulting in the conflict still have relevance today and are yours to uncover at Fort Battleford National Historic Site.

Welcome to Fort Battleford National Historic Site



Visitor Reception Centre

The starting point for your visit is the Visitor Reception Centre, staffed by Fort Battleford's friends group, the Battle River Settlement Foundation. Here you can find information about other sites and attractions, souvenirs, and a canteen. Looking for information on the NWMP, the events of 1885 or First Nations peoples? The site has a wide variety of publications for sale. Before beginning your exploration of the site, watch the two videos that provide background information on the NWMP and the events of 1885. Picnic areas adjacent to the Visitor Reception Centre, Hearing Assist and scooters are available for your convenience. From the Visitor Reception Centre, a costumed interpreter will lead you to the museum in Barracks 5 and guide you on a tour of the buildings inside the stockade.

Help protect the site for future generations.

Please remember the following while at Fort Battleford National Historic Site:

- Smoking is not permitted on historic grounds.
- All dogs must be on a leash and pets are not allowed in historic buildings.
- Open fires or barbeques are not permitted, but campgrounds are available adjacent to the site.

Origins of the Force



Atime of adventure and uncertainty, the late nineteenth century witnessed tremendous change. As the buffalo disappeared, the First Nations lifestyle was threatened. The Canadian government wanted to open the west for settlement. The killing of Nakota Indians by wolf-hunters in the Cypress Hills in 1873 confirmed the government's belief that this vast region required administration. The need for extending law and sovereignty to the west became the motivation for the formation of the North West Mounted Police.



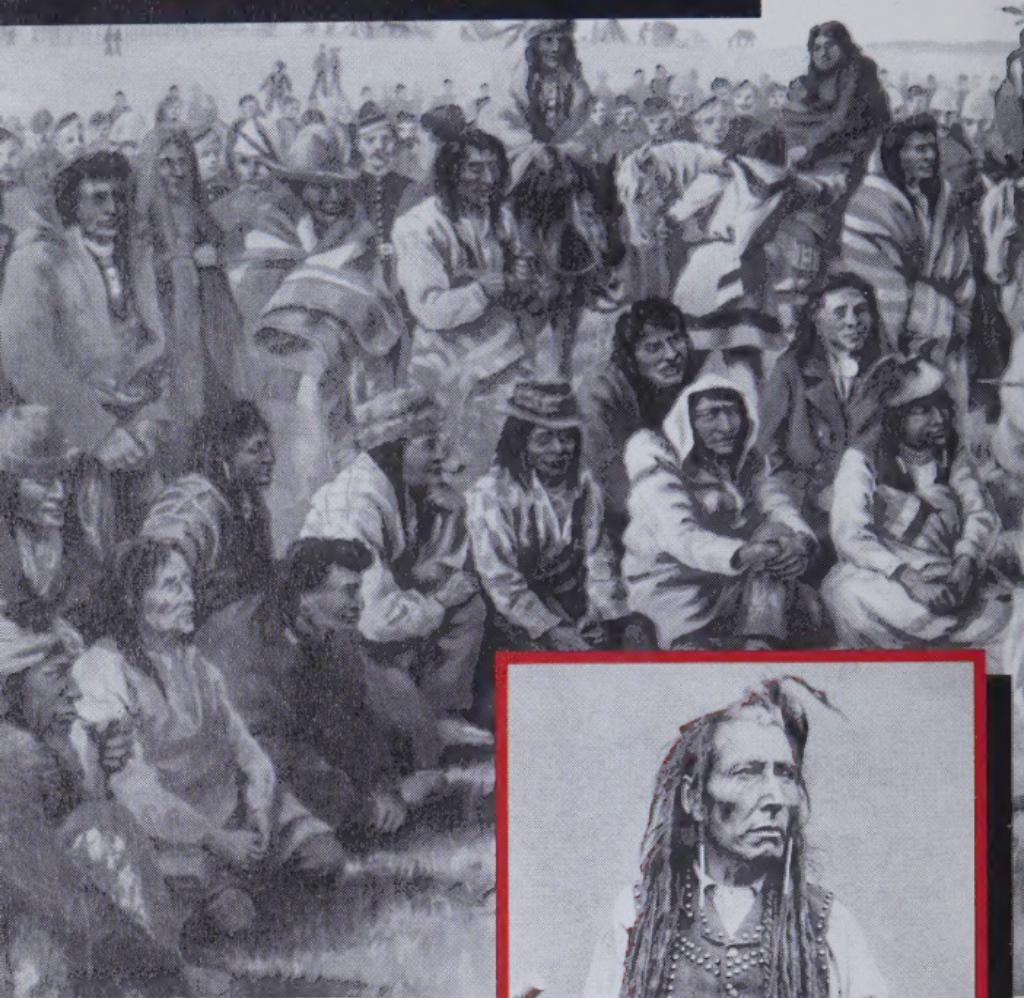
The force set out for the west in 1874.

Battleford was declared capital of the North West Territories in

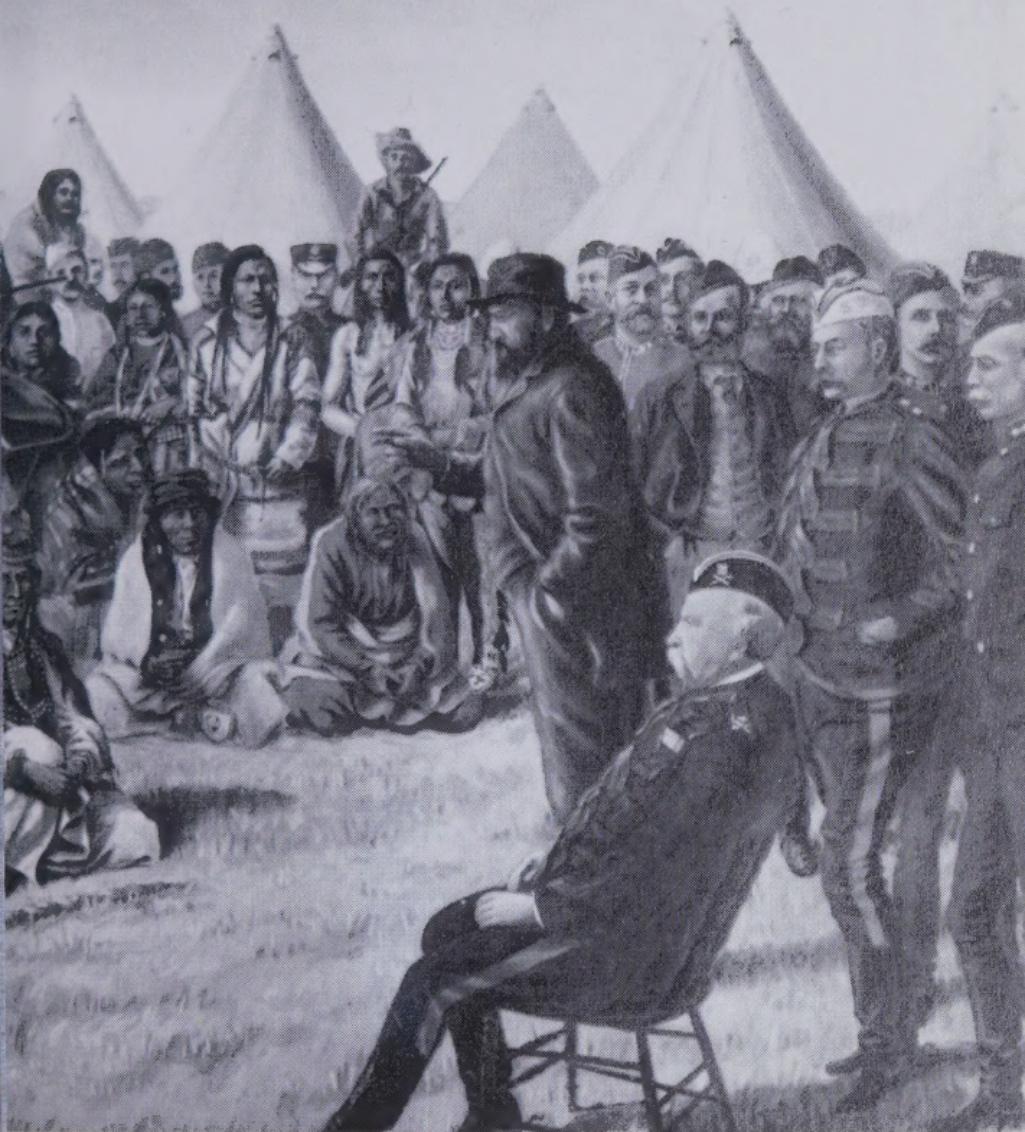


1876. That same year, construction began on Battle River Post, later known as Fort Battleford. Situated near the junction of the Battle and North Saskatchewan Rivers, the fort was close to large First Nations populations and Government House in Battleford. From the moment the force moved to Fort Battleford, one of their main activities was public relations with the surrounding First Nations peoples. The government believed that treaties were required before settlement could commence and that the local First Nations people needed to become acquainted with Canadian laws. The NWMP provided protection and assistance, and were involved with the negotiations and signing of Treaty 6 as well as distribution of annual treaty payments. The relationship between First Nations people, Indian Agents and the NWMP gradually deteriorated as the NWMP became enforcers of the government's Indian Policy.

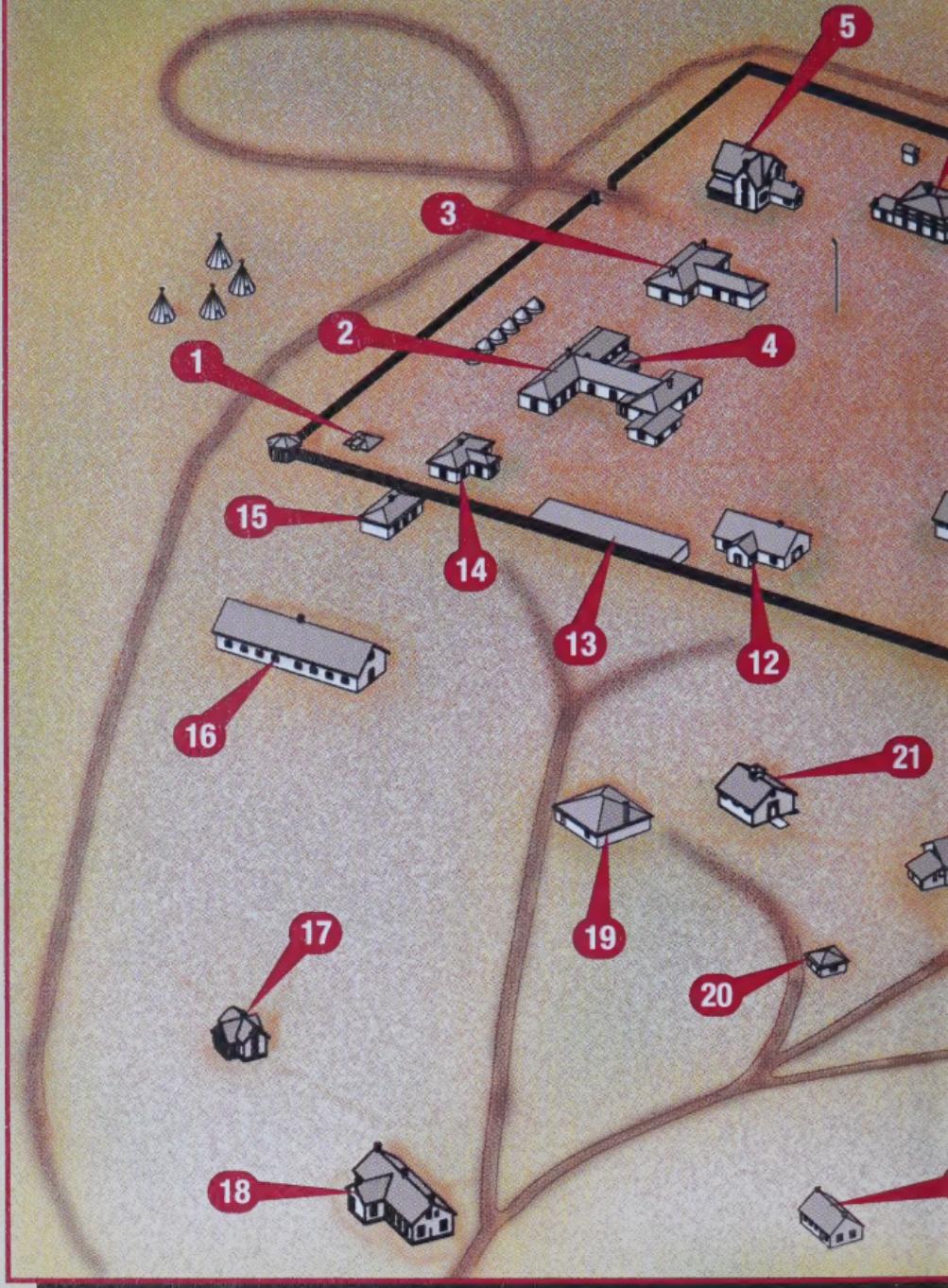
Armed Conflict of 1885



Frustrated by the government's response to their concerns regarding the treaties and their livelihood, First Nations peoples grew increasingly discontented. By 1885, violence had erupted on numerous occasions, including an attack on Frog Lake and Fort Pitt led by Kah-Paypamhchukwao (Wandering Spirit), war chief of Mistahimaskwa's (Big Bear's) band. While Big Bear did not condone the actions of Wandering Spirit and his followers, the government, who viewed these events as a rebellion against its authority, saw him as an instigator. As a result of these conflicts, the force stationed at Fort Battleford grew from 12 men and 16 horses in 1876 to 200 men and 107 horses in 1885, becoming the largest police force in the west. Fort Battleford became the focal point for the Canadian government's military operations, and the base during the battles at Cut Knife Hill, Fort Pitt, Frenchman Butte, Steele Narrows and the search for Big Bear.



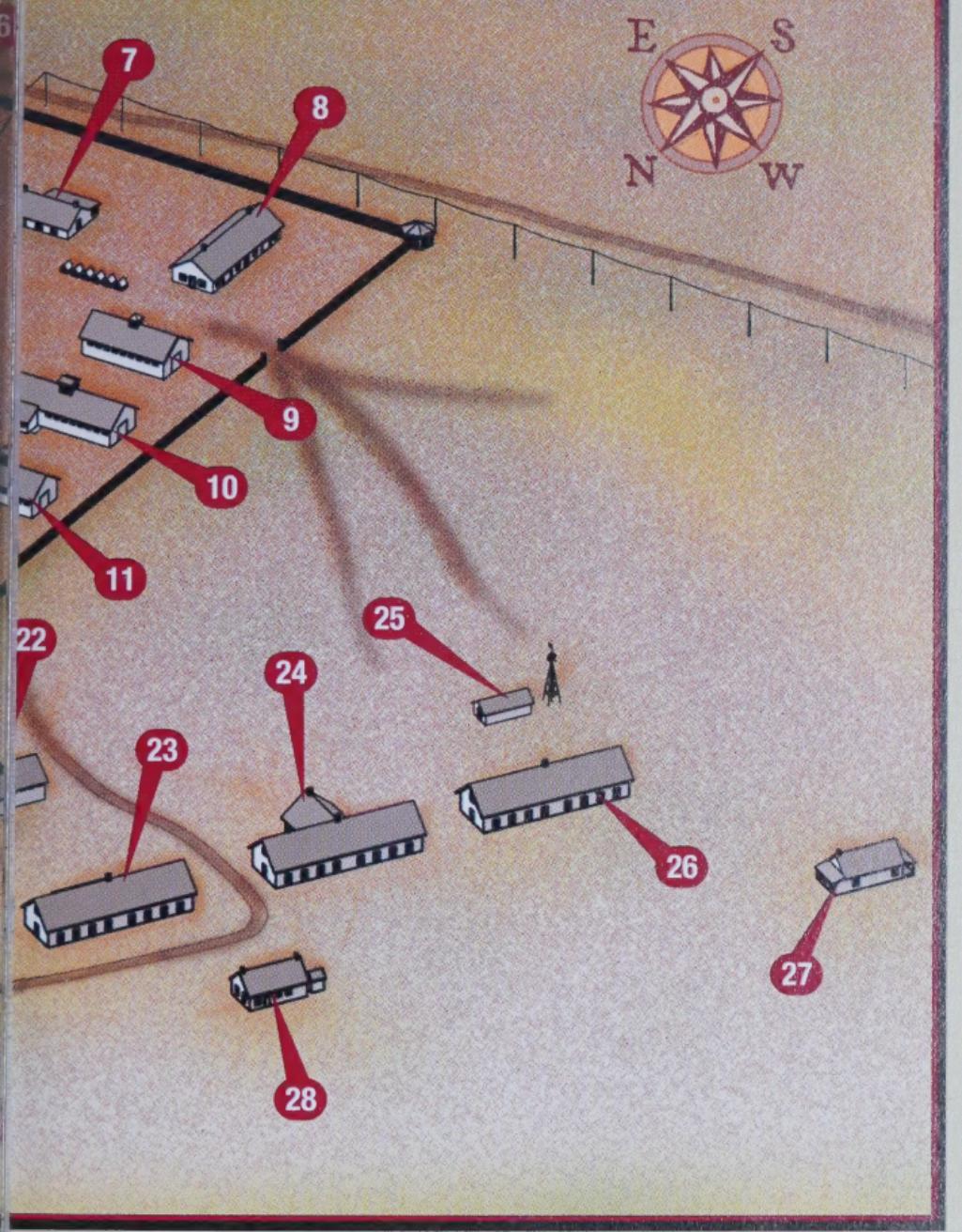
Around the same time, the fort also sheltered approximately 500 local people who feared an attack from the surrounding First Nations peoples. News of the skirmish at Duck Lake between the Métis and NWMP made the residents of Battleford uneasy and they sought protection within the stockaded walls of the fort. At the same time, Poundmaker and his followers were on their way to Battleford to request overdue rations. Expecting to meet with the Indian Agent, Poundmaker was surprised to find the town abandoned. Through a series of miscommunications, the Indian Agent refused to meet with the group. Although Poundmaker tried to prevent it, the First Nations peoples looted the deserted buildings. Later, the militia led by Col. Otter also looted the town on their way to the battle at Cut Knife Hill. Fear, coupled with a succession of violent incidents between townspeople and First Nations groups, kept the townspeople crowded inside Fort Battleford for almost a month.



Fort Battleford

The fort was constructed over a period of 30 years. Most of the buildings were erected between 1880 – 90. During that time, it would have looked more like this map. The stockade was not built until 1880 and was removed ten years later.

1. Powder Magazine (1880 – 1945)
2. Men's Barracks (1886 – c.1945)
3. Single Officers' Quarters (1876 – 1899)
4. Fire Engine House (1899 – c.1945)
5. Commanding Officer's Residence (1876 – today)
6. Officers' Quarters (1885 – today)
7. Officers' Quarters No. 1 / Guardhouse (c.1948 – today)
8. Indian Department Warehouse (1876 – 1889)
9. Stable No. 1 (1885 – 1930)
10. Stable No. 2 (1885 – 1930)
11. Officers' Quarters No. 2 (1885 – 1930)
12. Officers' Quarters No. 3 (1885 – 1930)
13. Officers' Quarters No. 4 (1885 – 1930)
14. Officers' Quarters No. 5 (1885 – 1930)
15. Officers' Quarters No. 6 (1885 – 1930)
16. Officers' Quarters No. 7 (1885 – 1930)
17. Officers' Quarters No. 8 (1885 – 1930)
18. Officers' Quarters No. 9 (1885 – 1930)
19. Officers' Quarters No. 10 (1885 – 1930)
20. Officers' Quarters No. 11 (1885 – 1930)
21. Officers' Quarters No. 12 (1885 – 1930)



11. Stable No. 3 (1885 – 1930)
12. Artificer's Shop (1878 – 1899)
13. Wagon Shed (1893 – 1924)
14. Married Men's Residence (1876 – 1899) / Hospital/Veterinary Depot
15. Sergeant's Mess Hall (1897 – 1920)
16. Immigration Hall/Barracks No. 4 (1884 – 1925)
17. Surgeon's Residence (1890 – c.1945)
18. Hospital (1886 – c.1945)
19. Blacksmith's Shop / Carpenter's Shop (1891 – c.1945)
20. Ice House (1899 – 1924)
21. Sick Horse Stable (1900 – today)
22. Stable (1885 – 1889)
23. Quartermaster's Storehouse / Men's Barracks (1886 – c.1945)
24. Mess Hall/Barracks No. 5 (1886 – today)
25. Pumphouse (1886 – 1932) and Windmill (1898 – 1925)
26. Concert Hall (1886 – 1930)
27. Sergeant's House (1890 – c.1925)
28. Guard House (1908 – c.1948, second location)
29. Guard House (1887 – 1908, original location)

By successfully suppressing the armed conflict of 1885, the government secured its claims to the west and paved the way for settlement and immigration. Instead of addressing First Nations peoples' grievances, the government tightened regulations governing most aspects of First Nations culture including schooling, socialization, livelihood, and customs. Many First Nations people were prosecuted for their involvement in the conflict. Poundmaker went to Fort Battleford to negotiate terms of surrender with General Middleton and was arrested. He was sentenced to three years in prison for treason. The search for Big Bear ended when he turned himself in at Fort Carlton. He, too, was sentenced to three years in prison for treason. The largest mass hanging in Canadian history occurred in November 1885 when eight First Nations men were tried for murder and hanged within the walls of the stockade. Many more served time in prison. These convictions impacted





Winnipeg Police Force with a Gatling gun
during the 1885 Saskatchewan Rebellion

the development of the west, serving as examples of the government's response to challenges to its authority. While there was continuing discontent among First Nations peoples, there were no further attempts at armed resistance. The legacy of 1885 lingers today.

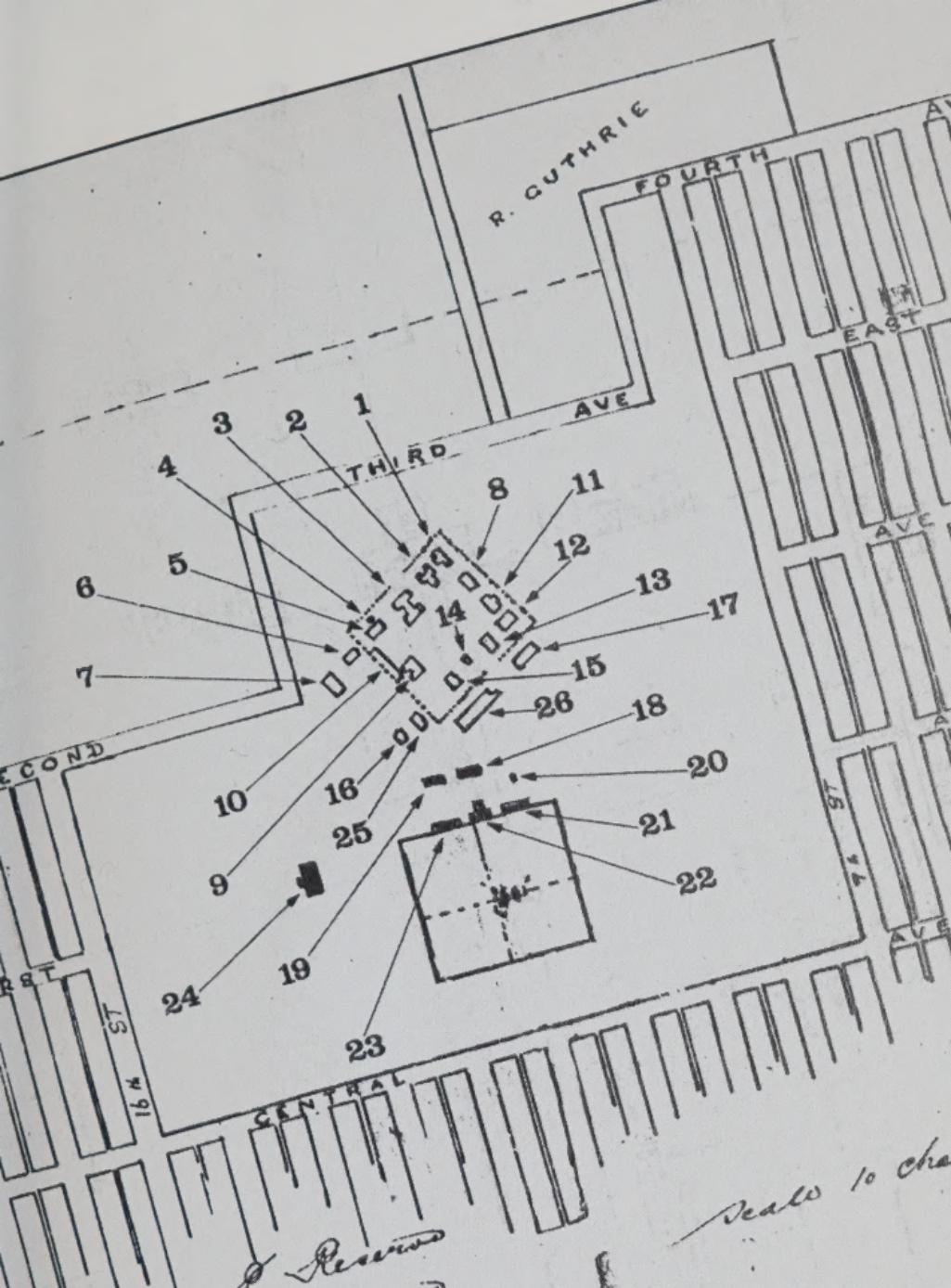


Inside the stockade

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The composition of Fort Battleford has changed over the years. From its construction in 1876 until its decommissioning in 1924, buildings were built, moved, dismantled and assigned different uses. At its height, the fort boasted close to 50 buildings. The five buildings still in existence represent examples of structures important to the organization and operation of the NWMP. Four of them, located within the stockade, are fully furnished. The guardhouse and sick horse stable, both constructed after 1885, were moved from outside the stockade walls to their present locations. The Commanding Officer's Residence and Officers' Quarters were both constructed before 1885. The Commanding Officer's Residence housed the senior officer and his family and is the oldest building at the fort. During the period of conflict, women and children were sheltered here. The Officers' Quarters served as the office where daily orders were dispatched and as the command centre for coordinating police and military operations. To help you to gain a perspective of the layout of the fort, the remains of other structures are indicated with markers.





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Littleford, and proposed
as squared relative to
old barracks with
buildings already created.

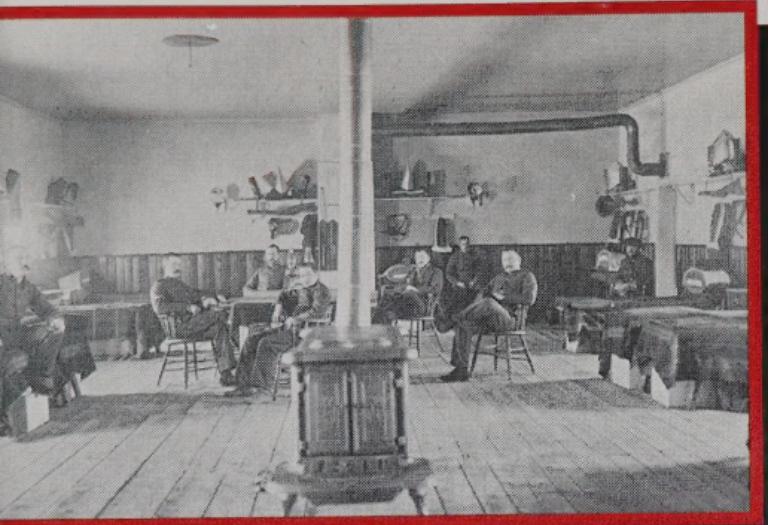
Scale 1000 ft



Outside the stockade

Beyond the walls of the stockade markers indicate where buildings used to exist. The fifth building still in existence is Barracks 5. Currently serving as a museum, it originally housed men and served as sleeping and eating quarters. As you walk around the stockade, look closely at the land and you will see depressions, including those of the original stockade wall. A number of historic trails connected the fort to its outposts and communities across the west. Surveying the surroundings will help you appreciate the selection of this site for the fort. Situated on a rise near two rivers and in close proximity to Government House, Fort Battleford helped establish a government presence in the west.





A Continuing Story

Fort Battleford is part of the larger story of the events of 1885. Many voices are needed to tell this story. Further information surrounding the events and legacy of 1885 can be found at:

Poundmaker Interpretive Centre
NWMP Cemetery
Colonel Otter Trenches
Batoche National Historic Site
Frenchman Butte National Historic Site
Fish Creek National Historic Site
Frog Lake National Historic Site
Telegraph Flats
Government House National Historic Site
Fort Pitt Provincial Park and National Historic Site
Battle River Settlement Foundation

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